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NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

JOHN KEATS. By Sidney Colvin. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917.

The result of Sidney Colvin's effort to produce a book "giving a full and connected account of Keats's life and poetry together, in the light of all the available material," is a volume that will prove deeply satisfying to every student of literature and to every lover of the poet. In the first place Keats as a human being is set forth in this work with a simplicity, a naturalness, a sober and convincing reality, that simply annul the effect of all false estimates or idle prepossessions, and that hold that wayward imagination, which in appreciative readers is so apt to blur the biographic page by the very facility of its coöperation, strictly to the contemplation of truth. In the second place, the critical portions of the work are not only light-shedding in the important, but minor, way of revealing sources and tracing developments, but are splendidly interpretative, adding to the reader's capacity for enjoyment.

Keats, of course, cannot be understood apart from his friendships. In dealing with the friends of Keats and with their influence upon the poet, Mr. Colvin brings into use a power of fair and full but decisive and pointed characterization that clears the emotional mists and glammers once for all from the atmosphere of Keats's circle and shows its members as they truly were. Leigh Hunt, Haydon, Brown, Cowden Clarke, and the rest—even persons less closely in touch, like Christopher North and Lockhart—are estimated with a sureness and authority that adds immensely to the reality and worth of the whole narrative. In all this, one never loses contact with the poet himself, nor does one think either of him or of his friends as bundles of abstract qualities; one perceives flesh and blood and character in all of them.

Through analysis, patient research, and comparison the author has been able to illuminate in the most interesting and profitable manner the nature of Keats's mental processes. He has, for example, wonderfully explained and illustrated that method of "evocation," as distinct from the method of exposition, upon which the poet was so dependent for the clearness and continuity of his thought. He has also, without attempting to explain the inexplicable, gone as far as a wise man could go, or as a lover of poetry would wish to go, in determining the sources, or rather the suggestions, that gave rise to some of the

poet's noblest passages. The exegesis upon the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is accompanied by a reproduction of the figures upon the Sosibios Vase, which closely correspond to the imagery of the poem. An "old and deep impression" received from Claude's noble picture, the "Sacrifice to Apollo," is shown to have had its effect in shaping this as well as other poetic visions. Even the famous "magic casements" lines in the *Ode to a Nightingale* may be plausibly connected with another picture of Claude's, "The Enchanted Castle." To follow clues of this kind under Mr. Colvin's guidance is extremely profitable, especially since the guide never forgets the essential marvelousness of the process by which impressions derived from other arts or from nature were suddenly and gloriously transmuted into poetry in the mind of Keats.

Lessons in appreciation, too, of the soundest and most helpful kind are the author's discussion of the poet's characteristic manner of vivifying even dead and senseless things, of giving them life instead of merely describing them, and of the success with which Keats applied his own principle—the principle that "the excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relation with beauty and truth."

Turning to a more technical feature of the work, one may say that seldom has a learned discussion of changing methods in the use of a metre been made to serve so good a purpose as does Mr. Colvin's account of the heroic couplet from its use by Chaucer to its use by Keats; for through this precise and scholarly discussion one is made better able to understand the difficulty of the work which Keats performed, to perceive the nature and cause of some of his faults, and hence to prize his excellences all the higher.

But the feature of the work for which the general reader will feel most grateful is its interpretation of meanings—especially the interpretation of *Endymion* as a parable of the experiences of a poet's soul in its quest after beauty. The author's justification of his analysis of this baffling and tantalizing poem is so sound and so eloquent—it so rightly upholds the value of poetry as a form of thought—that it may be regarded as perhaps the most important single passage in the book. "But why take all this trouble, the reader may well have asked before now," writes Mr. Colvin, "to follow the argument and track the wanderings of *Endymion* book by book, when every one knows that the poem is only admirable for its incidental beauties, and is neither read nor well readable for its story? The answer is that the intricacy and obscurity of the narrative is such as to tire the patience of many readers in their search for beautiful passages and to dull their enjoyment of them when found; but once the inner and symbolic meanings of the poem are recognized, even in gleams, their recognition gives it a quite new hold upon the attention. And in order to trace these meanings and disengage them with any clearness a fairly close examination and detailed argument are necessary. It is not with the simple matters of personification, of the putting of initial capitals to abstract qualities, that we have to deal, nor yet with any obvious or deliberately thought-out allegory; still less is it with one purposely made riddling and obscure; it is with a vital, subtly involved, and passionately tentative spiritual parable, the parable of

the experiences of the poetic soul of man seeking communion with the spirit of essential beauty in the world, invented and related, in the still uncertain dawn of his powers by one of the finest natural born and intuitively gifted poets who ever lived."

Mr. Colvin has been kind to common readers; he explains the more recondite parts of his subject with patient care, but with no lack of zest. He quotes freely for illustration, and thus when he remarks for example upon that "vein of airy and genteel vulgarity" into which Leigh Hunt was notoriously prone to slip in his verses, no one need be in any doubt as to his precise meaning. Throughout his book, he employs a method of treatment as serviceable as it is sincere and honest. Scholars will welcome his work not only because of its fulness and unity but for its interesting and authoritative discussions of obscure and difficult points.

MADAME ADAM. By Winifred Stephens. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1917.

The life of Madame Adam, which has stretched from 1836 to 1917, is so rich in historic and spiritual values that no amount of literary labor and skill could well be wasted in recording and interpreting it. This remarkable woman, happily named "*la grande Française*," has lived through the Revolution of 1848, the *coup d'état* of 1851, the heartache and misery of the siege of Paris, and two invasions of her beloved country. Politically, as mistress of a leading salon, as founder and editor of *La Nouvelle Revue*, as for many years the intimate friend of Gambetta, of Thiers, and of other French ministers as well as of many representatives of foreign nations, she has been a power. In the sphere of literature, her intimate acquaintance with such eminent writers as George Sand, Flaubert, Victor Hugo, Alphonse Daudet, Pierre Loti, Paul Bourget, and Maurice Barrès, has given her that initiation which is almost essential for the full and prosperous development of a great personality.

Intellectually brilliant, gifted with tact and personal magnetism, and with rare beauty, Madame Adam was always able to exert an immediate influence upon those about her. Deeply emotional, passionately sincere, moved by strongly felt moral convictions, she has experienced in their fulness and helped to guide some of the most significant tendencies of her time. At the age of twenty-two, three years before John Stuart Mill began to write his *Subjection of Women*, Madame Adam (then Juliette Lamessine) wrote an answer to Proudhon's attack upon women in his work *La Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église*—an answer which presents, says the biographer, "a bird's-eye view of the whole field of feminist reform." She was one of the earliest French women to see and welcome the possibility, realized in the present war, that women might do the work of men. During her whole life, through all vicissitudes, and in spite of her changes of opinion upon other matters, she has been a passionate believer in self-government.

Thus her life so far as the greater issues are concerned has been guided by a moral intuition which has made her at once clear-sighted and enthusiastic, a woman of the world and a prophetess. But there